

**EPA Region 5, Environmental Protection Agency
Chicago Asian Pacific Community Meeting**

July 18, 2000

Harry S. Truman College, Argyle-Broadway/Uptown Neighborhood

Co-sponsored by the Asian American Institute

AGENDA:

- Opening remarks by Norman Niedergang, Assistant Regional Administrator, EPA- Region 5
- Opening remarks by David Ullrich, Deputy Regional Administrator, EPA - Region 5
- Opening remarks by Commissioner Ngoan Le, White House AAPI Initiative
- Introduction to White House Initiative on AAPIs, by Daiva Balkus, Director, Office of Human Resources & Organizational Services (OHROS), EPA Headquarters
- Question & answer dialogue with community representatives and guests

MEETING MINUTES

In preparation for the community meeting, a documents package was mailed to nearly 100 Asian Pacific community organizations containing brief summaries of the White House AAPI Initiative, EPA's response plan to meet the goals of the initiative, and a response form to solicit questions from attendees; a number of questions from response letters and faxes were received and written answers were prepared prior to the meeting.

The community meeting was the first step for the Asian Community in the Chicago area to understand the goals of the White House Initiative. The meeting took place at Novar Hall, at Harry S. Truman Community College, on Chicago's north side, in the Uptown neighborhood, home of many Asian immigrants from countries, including, but not limited to: Vietnam, China, Laos, and Cambodia. A panel consisting of EPA senior managers and staff (*Daiva Balkus, David Ullrich, Norman Niedergang, Marla Hendriksson, Bill Tong*), as well as a commissioner from the White House AAPI Initiative (*Ngoan Le*), and executive director of the Asian American Institute (*Tuyet Le*), presented the objectives of the initiative and fielded questions from the audience.

Introductions

Norm Niedergang welcomed the attendees and introduced the panelists. He described the roles and functions of EPA Region 5. The Region has a six state jurisdiction including the Great Lakes. Thirty percent of all industries in the U.S. are located in this region.

Daiva Balkus (substituting for Romy Diaz, Assistant Administrator for Administration and Resources Management, EPA) gave a brief introduction about the White House AAPI Initiative and EPA's current activities in support of this Executive Order.

Tuyet Le commented on EPA's four pillars (i.e., community partnership, economic development, education pipeline, and employment/professional advancement), particularly the importance of community partnerships and urged the participants to take advantage of this time to provide input.

Ngoan Le, one of the 15 commissioners appointed by the White House Initiative on AAPI's, explained the goals of the White House initiative, and encouraged everyone to participate and take advantage of this historic initiative. Commissioner Le commended EPA for its work, but the relatively low attendance at the meeting indicates that Chicago's Asian Pacific community doesn't seem to work much with EPA. She stressed the importance of this initiative. For the first time, the Federal Government recognizes AAPIs as a viable community. The Presidential Advisory Commission will host a public hearing in the Midwest in late 2000 or early 2001 to gather comments or input on issues. The Interagency Working Group members are looking at service issues from a federal perspective. The Coordinating Committee is the working arm of the initiative. This is an opportunity to learn more about AAPI communities.

With the permission of the audience and panelists, the meeting was audio-taped for transcription purposes. Marla Hendriksson took notes and wrote bullet points on a flip chart. Priscilla Fonseca, Dolly Tong, and Bill Tong also took meeting notes.

Introductions and preliminary comments by participants:

Michael Frias and Lisa Kanemoto (*Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation - FDIC*): participated to learn from EPA's community meetings and to meet the AAPI community in Chicago. Mike is interested in learning about cases of predatory lending that may occur in the AAPI community. He already has met someone this evening who can possibly help him with some information.

Mei Syun Lin (*Program Manager, National Asian Pacific Council on Aging - NAPCA*): said this is a good Initiative, especially for outreach, and suggested that EPA hire NAPCA enrollees because they provide manpower and expertise. EPA needs to hire seniors in facilities, for example as a watchdog at water treatment facilities, and to build strong relationships with businesses and the community.

San O (*Southeast Asia Center*): works on community human services and educational programs for refugees.

Charlie Soo (*Asian American Small Business Association*): interested in economic opportunities with EPA.

Nora Bashir (*Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky's office*): interested in economic development opportunities with federal agencies.

Andrea Plaut (*Asian Human Services, Community Development Program*): works on women and children's health.

Clarita Santos (*Illinois State Attorney's Office, Asian Health Coalition*): interested in communication of water quality issues (i.e., how can the message alerts about *e. coli* contamination get to the ethnic communities effectively?)

Khamphai Singvausa (*Laotian American Professional Association*): Here to listen and learn more about what EPA does.

The following are the highlights of the question and answer portion of the meeting:

Question: What is EPA's involvement regarding community partnerships and economic development in Chicago and in other areas?

EPA: The Greater Chicago Initiative is a good example of EPA's involvement in community partnership. Its goal is to promote and restore environmental health and beauty in the greater Chicago area, especially the Southeast and West sides of Chicago, where there are lots of industries, landfills and hazardous waste facilities. The community partnership was formed through city-wide meetings with city officials, community leaders and residents. Grants funded by the Greater Chicago Initiative were awarded to the community for cleanup, pollution prevention, and education.

The Brownfields Initiative is another very good example of EPA's contribution to economic development and community partnership. The initiative has assisted in developing and cleaning up abandoned industrial sites and redeveloping old industrial properties once considered as neighborhood liabilities, public hazards and investment risks. The initiative has offered job training and helped create jobs for the cleanup and redevelopment projects. The Brownfields projects in East St. Louis, Illinois, and Fort Wayne, Indiana are good examples of job training programs where unemployed residents in the area were trained to performed the cleanup.

EPA Region 5 has worked with the Asian community on the following projects: 1) Chinatown Brownfields project; 2) developing guidance material in Korean for the Korean community, many of the members of which are involved in the drycleaning business; and 3) direct outreach activities made with the Hmong community in Wisconsin regarding fish advisories.

Question: Is there any funding available through EPA to support economic development in the community?

EPA (Norman Niedergang, David Ullrich): Yes, EPA funding is available through grants. There is a handout showing the list of grants available through EPA. Many minority communities, especially the Asian community, are not aware of grants available through federal agencies. There are few Asian American grantees. An Asian American contractor was recently awarded a multi-million dollar contract to perform remedial activities. In Region 10, a fish consumption pattern study was awarded to a group of Asian refugees through the environmental justice grant. The community collected data through a survey they put together themselves. With the collaboration of the University of Washington, the data collected was used to advise the local Asian American community on which and how much fish to eat at certain times.

Question: How does EPA allocate its funding? Is it earmarked for a certain region - for example, regarding the Asian American and Pacific Islander Initiative (AAPI) funding, will the West coast receive more than the Midwest because of the greater number AAPIs in that region?

EPA (David Ullrich): The EPA grant process is a complex process and competitive. Grants are awarded under a geographical balance. It is possible that there are more grant applications received by the Agency from a region where the Asian population is much larger than in other regions for projects relating to AAPI issues? In Region 5, small business grants are distributed equally to whomever applies. It is important to inform AAPI businesses that there are grant opportunities at EPA and other federal agencies.

Audience Comment from Mei Syun Lin, Regional Director of NAPCA: EPA, through its Senior Environmental Employment Program (SEEP) should consider awarding a grant to do outreach to the Asian Pacific community. The program currently employs retired AAPI individuals who can speak different AAPI languages, and are highly educated, making them good resources and community liaisons for EPA.

Commissioner Le responds: At the AAPI public meeting held in Houston, we learned that AAPI adults who manage the household should be educated to environmental health issues. We need to make them aware. Many live in urban areas and have typical problems in low-income areas, like substandard housing and living in industrial areas. Residents need to learn more about environmental/health issues.

Audience Comment: Outreach materials from EPA should be translated in different languages that AAPI's can read. AAPIs live in communities where they face the same adverse environmental impacts as other residents. Low income AAPI's have the same health problems as those living in urban areas, like asthma. Most of them live in an area that does not meet the building standards. Most of these households are managed by adults who are not well educated nor exposed to community education.

Question: How does EPA notify the public regarding beach closings due to *E. Coli*

contamination?

EPA (David Ullrich): The City of Chicago is responsible for notifying the public on beach closings due to *S. Coli* contamination. It normally done through newspaper and radio announcement, however, the EPA does not know if the ethnic members of the media are notified for such closings. Lab test results for *E. Coli* require 24 hours, and EPA is trying to develop a test that will give faster results so communities can be notified earlier. EPA will inform the City of Chicago regarding the concerns of AAPI's being adequately informed when beach closings are announced. EPA will recommend using ethnic media outlets for such notification.

Question: How does EPA handle emergency situations, and how does this information get out to the public?

EPA (David Ullrich): In response to public concern about chemical spills and accidents, EPA created the Chemical Emergency Preparedness program. It is a voluntary program to encourage state and local authorities, including the fire department, to identify hazards in their community and to plan for potential chemical emergencies. In addition, EPA established a regulatory program under the Clean Air Act to prevent serious chemical accidents that may potentially affect public health and the environment. The regulations include procedures and measures for emergency response after an accidental release of a regulated substance. To find out the emergency preparedness of the area where you live, it best to call the nearest fire department.

Question: Are EPA informational materials listed in the handouts available in Asian languages?

EPA (Daiva Balkus): EPA informational materials are available in several Asian languages and can be obtained by ordering through the Internet. The Web site for information resources is at, <http://www.epa.gov/ncepihom/foreign.htm>. You also may obtain those materials by calling the EPA program coordinators.

Question: Older buildings in Chicago have lead pipes, which means that the people drink water containing lead. What is EPA doing about this problem?

EPA (Bill Tong): The source of lead in homes is most likely the pipe or solder in the plumbing. Plumbing installed before 1930 is most likely to contain lead. Copper pipes have largely replaced lead pipes, but the use of lead solder with copper pipes is still widespread. In 1988, the states banned the use of lead materials in drinking water systems, but this ban did not eliminate lead contamination. The most common cause is corrosion, a reaction between the water and the lead pipes or solder. Federal and state rules requires optimization of corrosion control. Chemical treatment is required to reduce corrosion and the leaching out of lead. The chemical form a thin coating inside the pipe. Filtration does not control lead but there are filtering devices with such media as activated carbon, ion exchange resins,

activated alumina, all of which are supposed reduce lead.

The drinking water of Chicago is generally low in lead and meets the drinking water standard. EPA has set an action level of 15 parts per billion. It is advisable to flush the pipes if the faucet has not been used for six hours or longer.

EPA (David Ullrich): Another greater concern is the exposure of children to lead in based paints in older buildings. EPA is working on this issue with the City Department of Health. Young children, infants and fetuses appear to be particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning. Growing children will more rapidly adsorb any lead they consume. The only way to tell if a child has lead poisoning is to have them tested. If this is a concern, it is important to have the children tested for lead.

Question: How is the lead blood level data collected if this is a voluntary program? Are there out reach materials available in different languages? Are the Asian families who live in the low income housing in the Uptown neighborhood tested?

EPA: It is important to find out where the older buildings are located. Lead blood level data has been collected, by zip code; however, the data is not adequate. Few babies are tested because parents don't want doctors or nurses sticking needles to their babies. Testing should be done at an early age. EPA has outreach materials on lead in Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese available at the information table.

Question: Is there lead contamination in the soil? Does it affect the garden community who grow and eat their own vegetables?

EPA (Bill Tong): Yes, some lead contamination is found in the soil. The historic source of lead was the formerly widespread use of leaded gasoline in cars. Gasoline no longer contains lead. The City of Chicago has periodically conducted soil sampling for lead.

Question: Is there special funding available for the AAPI White House Initiative?

EPA (Daiva Balkus): Currently, there is no funding available through the White House AAPI Initiative. Funding for outreach and inventory activities will be accomplished through existing funds. All federal agencies are required to submit a report and strategies for meeting the goals of the initiative. From this information, federal agencies can work together in providing funds, education and other goals of the initiative.

Question: Are there employment opportunities in EPA? What does EPA do to recruit minorities such as AAPIs?

EPA (David Ullrich, Norman Niedergang): EPA will have 50-60 openings available in a few

months for entry level jobs. The job openings are technical jobs for scientist and engineers, clerical jobs, and public affairs. These openings will be posted at the Web site address of the Office of Personnel Management, <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>

Question: Is it possible to provide more senior housing through HUD and EPA's Brownfields Initiative?

EPA: FDIC can work together with EPA on the Brownfields Initiative. An abandoned site can be re-developed through the Brownfields Initiative; however, it is important to know what the future use of the site will be. Less stringent cleanup levels are allowed for industrial use of the site and more stringent cleanup are required for residential use.

Question for Ngoan Le - do you travel for EPA or for all of the White House Initiative?

Commissioner Le responds: I travel as a representative of the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs, however I have attended 2 of EPA's community meetings - in Houston and in Chicago. We have found that the first generation of AAPIs is very hard to reach out to; the ethnic community press is very effective in reaching them.

Question: What will happen next after this community meeting, and after the 2000 election?

The Executive Order requires a report to be submitted to the current President and to the next president. What has been started can not be stopped now, such as the dialogues and strategies developed by all agencies.

All who attended will receive a copy of the report EPA will put together. What was shared tonight will be put together in planning a strategy. An EPA Web site will be developed for the Asian community where they can find translated outreach materials and technical assistance on how apply for a grant. EPA is also planning to develop communication strategy in order to better reach out to ethnic communities.

Closing Remarks

EPA (Marla Hendriksson): This wraps up our session. Thank you very much for your questions and comments. They are very helpful to us as we develop our plan for AAPI activities in the coming year. Our next steps are to: 1) share the AAPI strategy - we welcome your input and suggestions; 2) develop the AAPI Web site; 3) provide technical assistance for grant writing - there is a tutorial available online; and 4) develop the Asian language translation protocol.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

ATTENDANCE LIST

EPA Representatives (* panelist)

*Daiva Balkus, *Director, Office of Human Resources & Organizational Services (OHROS), HQ*
*Marla Hendriksson, *Program Manager, EPA AAPI Initiative*
*David Ullrich, *Deputy Regional Administrator*
*Norman Niedergang, *Assistant Regional Administrator*
Levester Spearman, *Director, Office of Civil Rights (OCR)*
*William Tong, *Env. Scientist, Water; Asian Pacific Special Emphasis Program Manager, OCR*
Cheryl Allen, *Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Public Affairs (OPA)*
Stuart Hill, *Community Relations Coordinator, Office of Public Affairs*
Howard Pham, *Chemist, Contracts Management Section, Superfund Division*
Mardi Klevs, *Team Leader, Greater Chicago Initiative Team*
Priscilla Fonseca, *Environmental Scientist, Toxics Section, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*
Thelma Codina, *TRI Coordinator, Toxics Section, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*
Dolly Tong, *Env. Scientist, Pollution Prevention Section, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*
Steve Morgan, *Senior Env. Employee, Pesticides Section, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*
Nate Nemani, *Env. Engineer, RCRA Permitting Branch, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*
Lorna Jereza, *Section Chief, RCRA Enforcement Branch, Waste Pesticides & Toxics Division*

Other Government Representatives

*Commissioner Ngoan Le, *White House Commission on Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders*
Nora Bashir, *Legislative Liaison, Office of Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), 9th District*
Michael Frias, *Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation (FDIC)*
Lisa Kanemoto, *Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation (FDIC)*
Clarita Santos, *Illinois State Attorney's Office, and Asian Health Coalition*

Community Representatives

*Ms. Tuyet Le, *Executive Director, Asian American Institute*
Ms. Andrea Plaut, *Asian Human Services*
Mr. Charlie Soo, *Asian American Small Business Association*
Mr. Khamphai Singvausa, *Laotian American Professionals Association*
Ms. San O, *Southeast Asia Center*
Ms. Mei Syun Lin, *National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)*

Lessons Learned

Despite Region 5's mailing of invitation packages to nearly 100 Asian Pacific community

groups, there were relatively few representatives from the Chicago Asian Pacific community groups present at the meeting. Some mitigating factors: a reported rivalry between community organizations based in Uptown vs. Chinatown; some organizations that said they would attend were unable to attend due to personal emergencies; also, ethnic media organizations were not invited (on the advice of our counterparts who organized previous AAPI public meetings in other Regions). In hindsight, EPA and other agencies could have improved meeting attendance and extended outreach to the AAPI community by inviting the ethnic media organizations.

On the positive side, the community representatives clearly welcomed the government's efforts regarding the AAPI initiative, and they asked a number of detailed questions, both through the invitation response forms and in person at the meeting. EPA's preparation for and response to audience questions was good. EPA, FDIC, and community representatives were able to share ideas regarding the environment, health, education, economic development, employment, and business opportunities.